

We have some marvelous readings to reflect upon today, readings that speak about food for our bodies, but also readings that bring food for our minds and our souls.

Beginning with our first reading, we find an unnamed servant of the prophet Elisha hesitant that the 20 barley loaves he brings to the prophet will be enough to feed the 100 people gathered nearby. Elisha is confident though, even quoting the Lord, saying: "They will eat, and have some left over." Was it a miracle, or was it something that happens in our families when unexpected guests appear at our table, and we make do with what's there, each one conscious of the others who need to be fed as well?

In a similar way, the gospel story of the feeding of the 5000 be a very different miracle story. This wasn't a matter of life and death. If these people had not been fed they would have survived the night, and made their way back home, probably chilled, weary and hungry, but life would have gone on as before. What we have here is just an ordinary action of Jesus, a situation that was neither dramatic nor exciting.

Truth is that the real hero of this story is that little boy who was willing to let Jesus have the lunch he'd brought with him. Like all children we hear about in the Gospel, we see him as open to the presence of Jesus and to the message he had to share.

Barley bread was the cheapest bread available, the sustenance of the poor and working class people, while the fish, to be still edible after some hours in the sun, would have to be pickled fish. That's what the boy hands over, and that action of the boy helps us to understand why Jesus sets children before us as models. It is because they are open. They are willing to try something new and they are trusting. We may see boys and girls as nothing more than little bundles of energy, but we have no idea of who or what they may become. There's no way of knowing what God may do with their "five barley loaves and a couple of dried fish."

Bible scholars across the centuries have wondered about the real meaning of this reading. One interpretation is that many people had brought food with them, and Jesus had noticed the baskets or hampers they were carrying. Where else would the 12 baskets have come from, which later on were able to be filled with the leftovers. But people being people, they were cagey, afraid to let it be known, lest they would have to share what they had with the hungry crowd.

But when a little lad came forward and gave his lunch to Jesus, so that it might be shared with everyone, his generosity shamed their selfishness, and they began to share with one another. Once the spirit of sharing and caring took over, it turned out there was food enough for all and to spare.

Whatever the situation, a miracle was worked that day, a miracle that is capable of being repeated again and again in our own time, considering the waste that happens in so many parts of our western world, if only we can bring up the will and the energy. And that's what St. Paul is urging us to do. "I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit that binds you together in one Body.

As an incentive to working towards this, Jesus has given us the Eucharist, our table of plenty, where all of us are nourished with his Body and Blood, so that we in our turn may share of ourselves as he did.

It's a constant reminder that we form One Body with him, that as grains of wheat are gathered and milled into flour to be baked into one bread, and grapes are crushed to ferment into one wine, so we are called into a unity of self-giving that will serve as a leaven to our fractured world, and help it to grow into the Kingdom of self-giving love which Jesus came to form here on earth at his Father's behest.

May that be our hunger as well.